

NEWS ARTICLE

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Balance, Not Ambulance!

There's a poem titled "A Fence or an Ambulance," written by Joseph Malins in 1895, that tells the story of a town that had to decide whether the townspeople would put a fence along a dangerous cliff, or station an ambulance in the valley to pick up people when they fell. (1)

People voted for the ambulance.

Interesting how many people may make similar choices regarding diet-related diseases. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy People 2010 report, ". . . dietary factors are associated with four of the 10 leading causes of death: coronary heart disease (CHD), some types of cancer, stroke, and type 2 diabetes. These health conditions are estimated to cost society over \$200 billion each year in medical expenses and lost productivity. Dietary factors also are associated with osteoporosis, which affects more than 25 million persons in the United States . . ." (2)

Yet, for many people a figurative ambulance in the valley is their FIRST and LAST line of defense against diet-related diseases. That ambulance might take the form of:

- Popping pills rather than putting healthy food on our plates.
- Surgically altering our bodies rather than changing our diets.

Consider, instead, building a healthy diet fence. Here are some motivational tools to help you start the construction.

1. CONSIDER THE SIDE EFFECTS.

Food poses fewer complications than pills. Here are some possible side effects you may find listed for various medications: skin rash, fainting, impotence, gas, cramping, constipation, headache, nausea, diarrhea, death. . .

Have you ever found a similar warning label on a fruit or vegetable?

2. DO YOU PAY AS MUCH ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY AS YOU DO THE WEATHER?

If you lived in a flood plain, you'd probably take out flood insurance on your home. If you lived in an earthquake area, chances are you'd build a structurally strong house. Many of us have a family history of a diet-related disease. Or, our blood cholesterol levels or blood sugar levels and so on may be higher than desirable. As a billboard ad once proclaimed, "If you don't take care of your body, where else will you live?"

3. REMEMBER: A LAST LINE OF DEFENSE IS A LAST LINE OF DEFENSE.

Pills don't help all people. Not every surgery is successful. It's better to have these as your back-up strategy, not your ONLY strategy for staying healthy.

Eating a healthy diet won't always prevent an illness. However, a history of healthy eating may help us recover more quickly from surgery. Or, we may need fewer or lower doses of medication.

4. GET BETTER OR FEEL FANTASTIC?

Pills and surgery may help you feel better when you're ill. Yet, better may still be a long way from how fantastic you could feel practicing preventive behavior.

5. LEAVE THE "EXTREME CUISINE" TO FOOD TV.

Jaime Ruud, a dietitian in private practice, has found her clients are more likely to stay with normal foods rather than extreme diets.

Whether you're trying to eat healthy to help prevent heart disease, manage your weight or for overall wellness, you'll probably do best with a diet composed of everyday foods. Food patterns focusing on just a few foods become B-O-R-I-N-G. You may lose weight or lower your cholesterol cause you can't stand to eat much more of that food. Remember when the grapefruit diet or the cabbage soup diet were popular? How many people do you know still following them years later?

Another example is when a diet plan is composed of foods hard to find in everyday eating situations. If all you can eat when dining out is the bun or perhaps just the piece of meat, you're likely to drop the diet.

Plus, when you limit your dietary choices to hard-to-find foods or extreme combinations of foods, you run the risk of missing important nutrients or overdosing on others.

6. "YOU MISS 100 PERCENT OF THE SHOTS YOU NEVER TAKE" (WAYNE GRETZKY, HOCKEY STAR).

As reported in the February 2000 FOOD REFLECTIONS newsletter (<http://www.ianr.unl.edu/ianr/lanco/family/ftfeb00.htm>) a study by the Harvard School of Public Health found women in the Nurses' Health Study who followed a heart-healthy lifestyle that included a healthy diet reduced their chance for heart disease by up to 82 percent. Even though only around one percent followed all the guidelines, the researchers felt doing SOMETHING was better than doing NOTHING. JUST DO SOMETHING!

7. IMMERSE YOURSELF IN POSITIVE MESSAGES

Joseph Joubert's timeless advice of "Children have more need of models than critics" applies equally well to adults.

Surround yourself with sources of sound advice. For starters, check the American Dietetic Association's Web site (<http://www.eatright.org>) and follow the "Nutrition Resources" and "Gateway to Related Sites" links.

8. IT'S ALL ABOUT TASTE!

Eddy Hogan, RD (registered dietitian), LD, a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association, frequently asks people if they could take five pills a day to help prevent cancer, would they do it? She goes on to say, you can eat FIVE fruits and vegetables daily as a natural source of protection against certain cancers. They taste great, are affordable and no prescription is required.

For more information about the possible protective relationship between specific fruits and vegetables and various cancers, check the National Cancer Institute's "5 A Day" Web site: <http://dccps.nci.nih.gov/5aday>

9. THE CLIFF OR THE AMBULANCE?

Let's return to the top of the cliff. When it's time to put food on your plate, which approach will you take-fence or ambulance? Prevention or patch-up? The choice is up to you.

If you have a question, call Linda Bowman, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent, The University of Florida--Santa Rosa County Cooperative Extension Service--IFAS, at (850)623-3868 or (850)939-1259, Ext. 1360 for south county residents, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. weekdays. Hearing impaired individuals may call Santa Rosa County Emergency Management Service at 983-5373 (TDD).

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